

## INTRODUCTION

This volume is the result of the third international conference *The United States and the World: from Imitation to Challenge* held in Cracow on May 29–30, 2009. The event was organized by the Chair of American Studies at the Institute of American Studies and Polish Diaspora, Jagiellonian University. It was one in a series of international conferences organized by the Institute, each of which has gathered numerous researchers from Europe, America, and Asia. The conferences reflect the research agenda of the Chair of American Studies, which is not limited to the United States exclusively, but also embraces Canada and Latin America. What is of special importance is that the present conference as well as two earlier ones, *The United States and Europe: Conflict versus Collaboration*<sup>1</sup> in 2005 and *U.S. Foreign Policy: Theory, Mechanisms, Practice*<sup>2</sup> in 2007 were a vivid sign of endless interest in “America,” as a widely understood concept. She, and the country of the United States in particular, inspires admiration, irritation, and, in research activities, raises various questions and issues to be studied. All three conferences that we hosted met with interest in the academic community, and the papers and contributions had a certain explanatory impact on the main themes of the conferences.

The conference *The United States and the World: from Imitation to Challenge* was meant to gather those interested in various aspects of the mutual connections between the United States and the world. It concentrated on the problem of the model of American democracy, the presidential system, American politics, American society, American culture and the world's reflections about them – from imitation to challenge. For this, there was an invitation to scholars from many research fields: political science, philosophy, law, culture studies, economy, and sociology. It was a result of our vision of American Studies as an interdisciplinary effort. And so, thanks to the rich and diverse approaches of the participants, our vision turned out to be true.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrzej Mania, Paweł Laidler, Katarzyna Spiechlanin, Łukasz Wordliczek. 2005. *United States and Europe. Conflict versus Collaboration*. Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Andrzej Mania, Paweł Laidler, Łukasz Wordliczek. 2007. *U.S. Foreign Policy: Theory, Mechanisms, Practice*. Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press.

A review of the contributions provides an indication of the most important ideas reflected at the conference. A starting-point for the debate was Christopher Coker's (London School of Economics) paper *The US and Europe: Same Values, Different Norms*. The question of the proximity of Europe and the United States was one of the crucial issues also touched on by other participants. Similarly, a hotly debated issue was the problem of "The American Creed and Contemporary American Society." During this session, researchers' attention moved from the migration studies (Małgorzata Dziekońska) through the issue of ethics (Marta Koval) to the presidential leadership debate (Bohdan Szklarski).

American ideology was also studied and questioned. It was covered in several panels under the common title "*Ideologia Americana* or *Americanism in Action*." Some of the presenters touched on the issue of "Transatlantic Encounters" (David A. Jones, Joanna Waluk, Crister S. Garrett).

One of the most debated themes dealt with foreign policy. Papers were of a theoretical character, from the promotion of democracy in the world (Grzegorz Nycz) through development assistance (Dominik Kopiński), to norms and values (Piotr Waldemar Pietrzak). Other participants were devoted to researching relations of the United States with other parts of the world with particular interest in the inter-American sphere (Karol Derwich) and American leadership (Małgorzata Zachara) and its limitations (Randall W. Stone's inaugural paper).

The question of creating a model for U.S. foreign policy was also studied. Here some papers were related to governmental studies: from the Supreme Court (Paweł Laidler) and federalism (Tomasz Wiecech) to fund-raising (Renata Nowaczewska).

One should not be surprised by the fact that the conference was also devoted to the idea of "Exceptionalism and Democracy Promotion." An introduction to the topic was delivered by Benjamin P. Greene, while other participants explored the issue in detail: Obama's rhetoric analysis of Patricia Hart, exceptionalism in sports (Karsten Senkbeil), and export of American popular culture (Cristina Stanca-Mustea).

The session on "Continuity and Change" stimulated further discussion. Here questions of American way of life (Zinovia Lialiouti), the first-100-days-issue (Krzysztof Michałek) and the influence of the American law system on Eastern Europe (Marius Văcărelu) were studied in detail. Also, a very valuable session was the one on "School Reform: Context and Specifics" with papers by David J. Jackson, Grzegorz Mazurkiewicz, Kathy Farber and William T. Armaline.

The effect of the conference is reflected in the contributions that follow in this volume and in the rich, interdisciplinary debate over the American impact on the world, integration in *Pax Americana* and patterns of integration in other parts of the world, different and/or similar approaches to challenges to international order, and – last but not least – the issue of continuity and change in politics. Here one also needs to mention the ever-present debate on the American "export" of values: separation of church and state, human rights, the idea of sovereignty, the rule of separation of powers, modern federalism, democratization approaches, Americanism, American Studies dilemmas, American exceptionalism, uniqueness in contemporary American society, and patterns in foreign policy.

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This volume allows the reader to follow the debate at the conference, a debate that unified such diverse researchers over one topic: *The United States and the World: from Imitation to Challenge*.

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